

Chapter 1

Aboard the *Fair Winds*, March 2011

Erin Jacobs watched the island of Great Haven slide over the horizon at seven minutes after dawn. The eastern sky was all spreading apricot and salmon clouds by then, painting the island in a golden rim, the ocean clapping softly against the limping yacht's bow. The soft chugging of the its diesel motor fell flat into the sea.

Erin shielded her face from the light, peering ahead. Nothing looked to have changed. Not from the jutting height of Bella's Leap at the island's southmost tip, to the embracing curve of the main beach, to the gulls lazily trailing her mast. And look, there was the same sign on the marker at the head of the channel, reading *Welcome to Great Haven* in faded cursive letters.

Only, everything had changed, hadn't it?

Four years had passed, and she was alone on her boat. Four years since she and her father had sailed away, and she had never intended to come back.

Her heart ached with regret as she steered around an underwater coral crop she knew jutted into the edge of the channel. Her father had taught her to avoid it. He'd taught her all about the waters around Haven.

Erin tried to shake the memory away. That wasn't the reason

she was here now. Her sister Skye – who had never once called since Erin left – had reached her on a bad connection to the satellite phone, and told Erin she needed to come home before the call broke off.

Erin, who'd been between jobs in the Bahamas, had jumped a boat to Florida and then a flight to the Gold Coast where she'd collected her boat (and hastily insufficient provisions), and turned north. Three days later of sailing around the clock, and here she was.

Well, just.

The *Fair Winds* had clearly suffered in neglect. There'd been mould growing in the freezer box, shackles loose on their moorings. And then an hour ago, as soon as she'd met the first famous bluster of the Haven winds, the boom had cracked like a whip and the main halyard – the rope holding up the main sail – had snapped.

Erin had pulled the sail down in the dark and slung it in alternating pieces over the boom. The breakage itself wasn't a disaster; she could move around the boat with her eyes closed, and knew how to limp along on the foresail until she was close enough to start the motor. But she tried and failed not to see the event as an omen.

Her stomach flipped as the island neared, close enough now to pick out the individual palm trees behind the dunes. Her body knew this was home. She loved Haven's deceptive beauty, where the paradise of beaches and forest was set in a stretch of tricky waters, with frequent harsh storms and fierce tides.

Even now, she could see the spray crashing below Bella's Leap. At the top of the cliffs, the peak of Helmut's art studio was just visible on the next point – everyone said he was crazy to live up there with the storms. To the west, the cliffs dropped

dramatically into a long main bay. The village was at the western end of the premium white sand, while the eastern end was lined with palm trees – the resort’s front to the beach.

Erin frowned.

Wait, something had changed.

The bay should have held a dozen anchored yachts, as it had the day Erin and her father had sailed away. Now, the water was all but empty. She throttled down the motor, her ears straining to hear the powerful engines of the tourist shuttle coming from the mainland. But there was only the whine of wind and the feather-rush of gulls.

Too quiet.

Erin squinted at the resort again, still in the shadow of Bella’s Leap. It looked as though a fence ran along the front, a nine-foot, chain-link, keep-out kind of fence.

Erin’s chest hollowed. Wait, was the resort *still* closed?

Three years ago, when she’d been racing in the Seychelles, she’d heard on the grapevine that the Great Haven resort had shut down. But that had been deep in the time she hadn’t wanted to hear anything of home, and it was old news anyway. Yes it had closed – the same week she and her father had left – but temporarily, for renovations. The new owner had assured the village it would reopen within six months.

Now, as Erin limped into the jetty, the desolation of the shore put a chill in her heart. There were no surf skis on the beach, no catamarans. No toboggan carving a wake across the water. She could see two fishermen down at the far western point, their lines in the ocean. But the jetty itself was empty.

Why hadn’t Skye mentioned any of this?

Killing the motor at just the right moment, Erin let the yacht drift into the pier, throwing out the fenders and taking up the

stern rope. With one hand on the railing, she jumped for the wooden deck and threw the rope around a hitch, just as the yacht fenders grazed the piers. The *Fair Winds* groaned to a stop.

There. Perfect.

Immediately, a wind gust caught the boom and her mainsail slid in a rush of canvas, landing in the water on the other side of the hull.

Erin swore some delicious curses she'd learned in the Caribbean. She swung herself back up onto the deck and scrambled around to retrieve it. But with the snapped halyard, the sail had gone completely overboard. Not only that, but it had snagged on the railing on the way down, tearing a gash in the fabric. Getting it back on board soaked Erin through, and elicited her most creative swearing. If the quiet hadn't been disturbed, it certainly was now. The air should be blue.

At least there wasn't anyone around to hear.

Only, as she finally hauled the last of the damaged sail on board, Erin's neck prickled. Someone was watching. Spinning a slow circle, she found the jetty still empty, and so were the decks of the few other boats. Not a soul on the beach either. Then she heard bubbles.

"I haven't heard language that bad since my sergeant in boot camp," said a male voice.

Erin spun to see a diver had surfaced a few metres away, and was watching her with an amused expression. His blond hair was slicked against his head, his mask held lazily in his hand. He looked the mocking type.

"You need some help?" he said.

"Nope, thanks very much."

Erin turned away, surveying the damage. The diver

disappeared. But a moment later he emerged at the jetty's ladder, climbed, and began shedding his gear.

"There's a sail repairer down the beach," he said, starting to strip his wetsuit, and shaking water out of his ear. He was built, this guy, solid like a rugby forward. One-and-a-half rugby forwards.

"I know," Erin said, frowning at his unfamiliar face. "Which one of these yachts is yours?"

"That one," he said, pointing across to a small tin motor boat. On the side its name read *Green Dream*.

"You live here?" she asked, feeling an odd qualm. After the unexpected dereliction of the resort, this man felt like an unwelcome invader.

"At the end of the point. Darren Travers." He offered his hand. "Dive services. Repairs, salvage, whatever, I do it."

She shook reluctantly, even though she had no real reason to loathe him except for his smart comments. "Erin Jacobs."

His eyebrow shot up. "Oh, you're Skye's sister?"

Erin felt a peal of nerves. She'd been gone long enough for there to be someone new in the community, someone close enough to Skye to know who her family was.

Then again, at least he hadn't said *Dr Jacobs' daughter*? Because then, she would have confirmation for her worst fears. That she'd left the island with her father four years ago, that he had disappeared, and that she was the only one that knew what had happened.

"I have to go," she said.



Erin ran down the jetty to the beach, then up onto the paved path into town. She took the western fork, skirting around the

buildings at the eastern end. All so familiar.

She hesitated outside the small driftwood house, its yard neatly trimmed with no leaf out of place. That was all Skye. But the tinkling windchimes in the paperbark were definitely her mother's.

Erin's mouth was so dry as she knocked.

Skye opened the door in a deep-blue sundress printed with white smiley faces, but her expression was anything but happy. Erin watched as shock, then contempt, pulled her sister's mouth into a string line.

"I never thought you'd actually come," she said.

Erin blinked. "But you asked me to."

Skye folded her arms, blocking the doorway, her dark ponytail swinging. "We had a brief conversation that got cut off, and then I never heard from you. That was over a week ago."

"You said to come home."

"I said to *think* about it."

Erin frowned and glanced around Skye, looking for clues for what was going on. She'd expected this meeting to be awkward, but Skye was acting strangely, as though there was something in the house she didn't want Erin to see.

"Is Mum here?"

"Not right now."

"Is she okay?"

"She's fine, Erin. She's off on one of her hikes around the island. Doing research."

"What for?"

Skye's didn't answer for a long moment. In the silence, Erin could only feel how different they were. Erin was wiry and tanned from a life on boats, her hair always split and bleached. Skye had their mother Anna's Celtic colouring: dark hair and

pale skin that scorched in the sun. While both of them could sail, Anna and Skye had always stayed on land under broad hats, while Erin had been the one begging to be out on the water.

Now, Skye's voice turned artificially bright as she said, "Why didn't you call?"

"I tried," Erin said. "No one answered. And then I had problems with the boat."

"The tower's been on the blink." Skye paused. "Wait, what boat?"

"My boat."

"You sailed here? What's wrong with a plane like a normal person?"

Erin took a shallow breath, sensing she had missed something dreadfully important in all this. Used to feeling tiny changes in air pressure at sea, surprise was unusual and unwelcome. "Skye, you asked me to come. I'm here now, so what was so important?"

The moment the words were out of her mouth, Erin regretted them.

Skye drew herself up with indignation. "What's so important? Did you *look* down the main beach? Did you once think, any time since you ran off, about what was happening here? No, of course not. You were too busy leaving us to cope after the funeral. With the resort closed, and the school running out of money, and everything else you never bothered to find out about."

Erin said nothing as the cicadas kicked off droning up in the trees. She wanted to take Skye's hurts away, but she'd been keeping her secrets for so long all she could say was, "I'm sorry I didn't call. But I still don't understand why you did."

Skye huffed a breath. "Look, it wasn't my idea, okay? And

while I do appreciate the apology, we are actually doing quite okay. I don't need you to breeze in after years away. So you feel free to go on to whatever glitzy race meet is on your calendar next."

"It wasn't your idea?"

Skye stepped out of the doorway and pulled the door shut behind her, as if she was about to walk Erin back up the path. Erin caught a waft of perfume. "You're awfully dressed up," she said, "who's that all for?"

Skye hesitated, and suddenly Erin had an idea of what was going on here. Yes, Skye was pissed at her for abandoning the island these last years, but she was also expecting a visitor. Someone she didn't want Erin to see.

"Who's the guy?" Erin said, guessing.

"Well, it's the new resort owner, if you must know," Skye said.

"The new owner?" This should have been good news, but Erin felt a flip in her chest like a silver fish.

"Yes. I told you we were doing just fine."

"But who's the owner?" she asked, bewildered as Skye opened the cottage gate. But then she didn't need the answer, because Erin had caught sight of a man coming down the road towards the house, and her blood shock froze to see him again.

"Tristan," she heard Skye call, her voice joyful and bright, and very far away.

All Erin could think was, *oh biscuits, Tristan*. Tristan Drummond, the man she'd been with for nearly two years before it all ended in a spectacular mess. The same man who'd then gone off and made a pile of cash in business-land. She sometimes caught his name in the yachting news, as an owner of a winning boat. Every time, her stomach would bottom out,

even if she was sitting in a harbour in Barbados on the other side of the world. The feeling of unfinished and not entirely pleasant business.

In that moment, she knew that Tristan was the one who had asked Skye to call, and also, that Skye was jealous as hell.

Son of a bitch.



If Tristan had not been walking, Erin wouldn't have recognised him. When they'd been together all those years ago, he'd been an ambitious boy from the island putting himself through business school on the mainland. She'd met up with him after classes, hitching rides with other deckhands in the marina to the university bar. She would always be half-way down a beer when he came rushing in, late from work on some assignment. He'd always been in cargo pants, his hair fit for seagulls, but his posture was always straight as a hoisted mast. She'd heard that he'd cleaned himself up in his final year, but that was after they'd ended, with Tristan declaring he was never coming back to the island again, and Erin secretly thinking that was fine by her. She'd not wished him well as he'd stalked away, still carrying himself in that upright way. *Mast up the arse*, was closer to what she'd thought then.

Now, though, here he was, a transformed man. His haircut was sharp, his suit a casual charcoal that he wore with open shirt. Erin had worked for enough millionaire yacht owners from the Caribbean to Croatia to recognise the expensive tailoring, the soft leather of his shoes. He'd lost youthful roundness to his face and acquired instead a chiselled bone structure, setting off the dark green eyes. He still walked the exact same way, only now it worked with all the other stuff he

had going on. He didn't look pretentious anymore. He looked like he owned the island.

Erin wiped her sweating hands on her damp cut-off denims. How was it possible she could race for the line on a few tonnes of boat, against the raging elements, but seeing him again so threw her?

"Erin," he said, as he swept in before them, holding out his hands. She took them awkwardly, then found herself drawn into a flawlessly European double cheek kiss. "I was hoping I'd find you here," he said, his touch lingering as he let her go. "Though I tried Gus's first. You have trouble with your sail?"

"How did you know about that?"

Tristan chuckled and tapped his nose, as if he had a network of spies on the island just waiting to report every arrival. "Oh, I have my ways. How are you, Skye?"

Skye moved in for her own embrace, but Tristan put a steadying hand on Skye's arm. "Can I trouble you to give me a minute with E? I need to talk business, okay?"

Erin caught the mutiny on Skye's face, but her sister could hardly refuse, so she said she'd make tea and went back into the house with a resentful backwards glance, leaving the door open.

"Well, how about this?" he said, once they were alone.

"I know," Erin said, taking a small step back. "You surprised me. I seem to remember you said you were never coming back."

Tristan laughed and shook his head. "I said a lot of things. But I didn't really have a choice this time."

Erin raised her eyebrows.

"The resort. Come on, Erin, you must have known what was going on here."

"Skye never mentioned it."

Tristan's eyebrows popped up. "You didn't know it's been

closed for four years? Oh, I suppose that must have been after you left ... and Skye did mention you hadn't been in touch."

Erin looked away. She folded her arms, feeling misled, angry at all the changes that had happened while she'd been away, angry that he of all people knew more than she did. "Why not just call me yourself?"

"I'd rather talk about the opportunity. It's not just a new resort – it's way more than that. I have a special role for you in mind. There are dozens of people I could have, but you were my first choice. You were always the best."

He stepped towards her and took her hand. "Look, I know it's been a long time," he said, squeezing her palm. "But the island's dying, Erin. I plan to save it, and I want you on board."

Erin pulled her hand back. "First choice for what exactly?" she said, suspicious and aware Skye was probably eavesdropping through the window.

"There's a town meeting on Monday night. That's only two days to wait. Come and see what I'm planning. I'm not the developer from out of town pushing my ideas on the locals. I *am* one. And after, we can talk about your role. No obligations. You don't like what I offer? No problem."

"Sorry. Vague promises don't pay bills," Erin said, wary after empty promises of rich owners. "I've got a boat to keep in the water."

"Come on, E. I know you love the island. And I'm deadly serious. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be paying for the village to have a new doctor, would I? The practice is already leased to us, and he flies in Monday. Are you really going to leave Skye and your mum and everyone without hearing what I have in mind?"

Erin's stomach flipped again. *New doctor*. Someone to replace her father.

“Fine. Just until Monday,” she said.

“Great.” The smile creased his eyes. “Now, will you give Skye my apologies? I need to run back for a meeting. See you Monday.”

Erin stayed in the yard a full minute, staring after his straight back as he vanished around the corner. It was hard to imagine that her past with him had ever happened, and she hated that he’d extracted a promise to stay. But he was also right ... Erin wouldn’t forgive herself if she left behind a chance to help the island.

When she stepped through the cottage door and into the kitchen, she found Skye sitting at the kitchen table with her arms folded and thunderclouds on her face. The special cups were out, and Erin could smell fresh tea from the fancy box that smelled like rose petals, and only came out for special occasions.

“Where’s Tristan?” Skye said.

“He has another meeting now.”

“I see.” Skye rose dumped the tea into the sink, turning over the mugs with unnecessary force. “And what was all the secret talk?”

“I don’t know yet. I have to wait until Monday.”

This at least seemed to ease Skye’s anger. “I suppose you want me to make up the sofa bed.”

Erin shook her head, feeling sad in the familiar kitchen. She didn’t want to hold this guilt over the secrets she couldn’t share, didn’t want to be back in Tristan’s orbit. Didn’t want to be reminded of her father, or know there was a new doctor coming to take over his surgery. Didn’t want to witness the animosity Skye held for her. She should never have come.

“It’s okay, I’m staying on the boat.”



The day had turned into late afternoon by the time Erin had taken her sail to Gus's, and cleaned through the cabin and deck in a muddled fervour. She was bringing up a garbage bag, her sweating hair escaping from its rough bun, when she saw a figure waiting on the jetty.

"I heard you were home."

Erin dropped the bag, her heart beating like a rabbit's. Her mother was dressed in a wide sun-faded hat, hiking shorts and an old t-shirt that had ripped away its edging.

"Mum," she said, stepping off the boat. She hesitated. "I'm sorry, I'm filthy and I smell."

Anna pulled her into a hug anyway. "My, yes, you do!" she said, but didn't seem to care. She seemed delighted to see her eldest daughter, but Erin could only feel a tide of guilt.

Then, Erin noticed the sharp bones at her mother's shoulders. That her hair was full of great waves of silver. She seemed frail, a diminished version of the woman Erin remembered. The tide of guilt ran higher.

"I'm sorry that I ... that it's been ..." she began.

"You're here now," her mother said, putting out a hand for the garbage bag.

"No, no," Erin said. "I'll take it down later."

She wasn't going to hand her trash across to her mother as the first exchange they'd had in four years.

"Well, you'd better make tea instead then."

They sat on the deck, sipping from their cups, not saying much. The resort's construction fence loomed in the distance, but they didn't talk about it at first. Anna asked instead about Erin's life overseas, and Erin talked mechanically about this race or that. The gulf between the two of them seemed wider than the Mediterranean.

Then her mother said, “You know it closed two months after you left. Sold twice since then. The fence went up two years ago, to stop looting.”

“Skye mentioned it,” Erin said, but she was stuck on the *after you left*.

“Did she mention there’s going to be a new doctor?”

Erin looked down at her cup, nodding because she didn’t trust herself to speak. She didn’t want her mother to bring this all up.

Anna sighed. “Maybe it will be a good thing,” she said, but with a resignation that said she’d seen too much to count on it.

“Maybe,” Erin whispered.

Anna stood, leaving her cup on the deck. “I’m so glad you’re home, Erin. So glad. Why don’t you clean up and come see us up at the house?”

“I don’t know that I am home,” Erin said quickly. “I’m staying till Monday with this meeting thing, but I don’t know how long after that. Besides, I’m not sure Skye wants me up there.”

She braced for remonstrance, to see pain and hurt, or to have a Skye-style rebuke thrown back. But her mother just nodded slowly. “Well, I’ll come down and see you then. Every Monday while you’re here.”

“Okay.”

As Anna left down the jetty, Erin reflected that if she were Skye, Anna might have suggested a visit every day. But Erin had never been like Skye. Erin had been her father’s girl, and all of them knew it. And that made her secret all the worse.

Erin snatched up the garbage bag. She felt about as useful as the cast-off things inside it. A sailor unwelcome in her home port, and not much welcome in any others either. But she

couldn't go anywhere until her sail was fixed, so that would give her until Monday to come up with a plan.